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The fall destroyed the lower tiers, which had been at least sixty feet from the ground. Although a few newborns were born and freed from their cells, all the rest of the eggs, larvae, and pupae, numbering a couple thousand, were killed.

Queen Barbara was holding court outside of the nest on top of the tree branch, with Amanda, the queens, and the lead workers in company. Lady Helena flew back from the nest and joined the court.

“What is the condition of the nest?” asked the foundress.

“Your Majesty, it is excellent. The tiers and supporting stems are intact, and there are no cracks or weaknesses in the walls or cells,” explained Lady Helena.

“Then how did the bottom tiers collapse?”

“Your Majesty,” interjected Rebecca, “Lady Helena needs to explain why extensive burrowing was found in the lower tiers.”

“Well, Your Majesty, I would explain if Rebecca would stop interrupting me!” Lady Helena exclaimed.

“Continue, Lady Helena, for I, too, would like to know why there was burrowing in the lower tiers,” said the foundress.

“Burrowing was found only in the tiers that fell and in a few places in the third tier from the bottom. Our wasps

quickly reinforced those places so that the tier would remain strong and intact.”

“Thank you, Lady Helena, but why was there burrowing in the tiers? You haven’t answered my question.”

“We found moth larvae, which were digging through the cells and stems, destroying the tiers.”

“Aren’t we supposed to be inspecting for moth larvae?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, and previous inspections didn’t reveal their presence!”

“Excuse me, Your Majesty,” said Rebecca, “but moth larvae are hard to miss! A proper inspection should have revealed their presence immediately.”

“I concur, Your Majesty,” added Lady Jacqueline. “There is no excuse for this negligence!”

Everyone looked at the foundress, who was visibly having difficulty suppressing her anger.

“There will be a change in leadership and responsibility. Emily and Lady Helena, I am transferring your authority over the construction and maintenance of the nest to Rebecca and Lady Jacqueline.”

Vice Queen Rebecca and Lady Jacqueline smiled at this, while Vice Queen Emily and Lady Helena stood shocked.

“I recommend, Emily and Helena, that you do not protest. There is a lot more that could happen to you.”

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